

REVIEW

Rare Plants of Colorado. By THE COLORADO NATIVE PLANT SOCIETY. 1989. Rocky Mountain Nature Association, Rocky Mt. National Park, Estes Park, CO 80517. 75 pages; color photographs and illustrations: softcover \$7.95 + \$2.50 shipping & handling; Colorado residents add 3% sales tax.

Conservation organizations continually need summarized information about rare species to interest the general public, inform the novice botanist as well as the professional, and focus environmental awareness on the fragility of familiar landscapes. *Rare Plants of Colorado* meets these public information needs with elegance and style in a beautifully illustrated magazine format.

The editors' stated goals were to collect the most complete information available about almost 100 of the rarest species in Colorado, and to publish this information in a concise illustrated form that would increase general awareness and understanding of these plants and their habitats. This, they hoped, would stimulate further study of Colorado's rare plants and the habitats that appear particularly vulnerable to loss or damage.

Ninety-three species of plants are grouped into 8 habitat classifications including tundra, barrens, cliffs and canyons, forests, grasslands, shrublands, wetlands, and woodlands. This type of organization may be, at first, irritating to a botanist's taxonomic instincts, but provides an ideal way to discuss the fragility of the landscape. Each of these habitats is discussed in terms of conditions to which the plant life must be adapted, special communities which are found in the larger habitat, and particular threats to the habitat. This format allows the writers to present more ecological information to the general public than a phylogenetic arrangement could.

An illustration and a general location map for each species are accompanied by details of general interest, such as reasons for rareness, botanical history associated with the plant's discovery, or the meaning of the specific epithet. A wealth of information is packed into the discussion of each species for those willing to read carefully. The rest of us can be content to enjoy the beautiful photographs and illustrations.

The book should have been edited more carefully. Errors have crept in to a few of the plant discussions, and the list of suggested readings is quite perplexing in its organization. The authors fail to mention that Colorado has many more rare plants than are presented; this fact should have been spelled out. A second omission of note is that the status of each species is, astonishingly, not one of the items addressed in the discussions. These omissions would be easily corrected with a current comprehensive list of plants of special concern and their status. Finally, while the foreword section directs the reader to become a conservation activist, it fails to tell the reader what to do or, most importantly, what not to do if they think they have found an endangered plant.

This publication does what it was designed to do: interest and stimulate. Although this is not and was not meant to be a comprehensive reference, it does compile information that has not previously been available in a single volume. I have had the opportunity to share this book with several professional conservationists. Their enthusiastic response to *Rare Plants of Colorado* indicates an unfulfilled need for current comprehensive reference materials. *Rare Plants of Colorado* is a step in the right direction.—PATRICIA BARLOW, Department of Biology, University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131.